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The Wonder Gate

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THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

The Wonder Gate

A Play for Children in Two Acts

By

JANE ABBOTT

PHILADELPHIA
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The Wonder Gate

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The Wonder Gate

CHARACTERS

(*As they appear in the play*)

THE GIRL.
THE BOY.
THE STRANGER.
ZAN, *the Prince of the North, who has come to the Kingdom of Altruria with mighty battle-ships.*
WIM, *the Prince of the East, who has come to the Kingdom of Altruria with fleet horses.*
BAL, *the Prince of the South, who has come to the Kingdom of Altruria with a great army on foot.*
THORL, *the Prince of the West, who has come to the Kingdom of Altruria with air-ships.*
THE SPIRIT OF CHILDHOOD, *who is a Fairy.*
THE ROSE-FAIRIES.
THE TEAR-FAIRIES.
THE RAINBOW-FAIRIES.
THE QUEEN OF ALTRURIA.

There is also at the beginning and end of the play a Butterfly, but because it is a fairy butterfly it is visible only to those who truly believe in fairies. The others may call it Illusion.

The Stranger and the Queen of Altruria are played by the same person.

The scene of the play is laid on the Roadway outside of the Kingdom of Altruria.

The time of the play is now.

TIME OF PLAYING.—One hour.

This play was awarded a prize in a play contest of the Buffalo, N. Y., Chapter of the Drama League, in 1917.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Hilda and Noel, two little children, stray into the forest while chasing a butterfly, and find the locked door of the Kingdom of Altruria. A stranger gives them a box, which she says contains the only thing in the world that will unlock the door. Four mighty princes seek to conquer Altruria, but it is finally the mysterious object in the box that gains peaceful admittance to the Kingdom.

COSTUMES, ETC.

GIRL AND BOY. They may be from eight to twelve years of age, the BOY a little older than the GIRL. They wear summer clothing and no hats. At first entrance GIRL wears a necklace apparently of small red berries.

STRANGER. Apparently an old woman. She is bent, and wrapped from head to foot in a gray garment, with a hood that shields her face, and provided with a pocket.

ZAN AND OTHER WARRIOR PRINCES are all between twenty-five and forty, if played by adults. If played by children they should be boys larger than the BOY. ZAN wears heavy uniform and carries a large sword or saber. There are knives in his belt. WIM is in khaki with boots and spurs and has a gun strapped across his back, and there is a sword in his belt. He carries also a long spear. BAL wears a dusty uniform and has a knapsack on his back, a cartridge belt, a revolver (or two), and carries a gun. THORL wears a close-fitting uniform of gray or khaki, suggesting an aviator's suit. Helmet and tight leggings. He carries a knife or

revolver at his waist. In the appearance of all the Princes there is an exaggerated suggestion of armament, though burlesque should be avoided.

SPIRIT OF CHILDHOOD. This part is played by a large girl or a young woman, who should be a good dancer. She wears a white dress with short skirt, white stockings and white, golden, or silver slippers. Spangles on dress and in hair. Small wings on shoulders, if desired. Carries a small wand, tipped with a small gold or silver star.

QUEEN OF ALTRURIA. Played by a large girl or a young woman. Dressed in white and silver, silver-trimmed mantle, and a silver crown. She wears also the necklace supposed to be made of small red berries, which is worn by GIRL in ACT I.

FAIRIES. The Rose Fairies should wear short dresses of pink, with roses in their hair, the Tear Fairies dresses of gray tulle and silver, the Rainbow Fairies soft clinging dresses of bright colors, with flying scarfs.

PROPERTIES

For GIRL: Half a dozen cookies (small round cakes), necklace of small red berries.

For STRANGER: A small wooden box (a cigar box with labels removed will serve), which has a keyhole and is apparently locked. Inside is a scroll of yellowish paper.

For BAL: Two pieces of bread, in knapsack.

For SPIRIT: A golden (highly polished brass) key.

HEARD OFF STAGE: Music of flute, etc. A low rumble and drumming sound. A sound of marching feet.

SCENE PLOT AND SUGGESTIONS FOR STAGING

INDOOR STAGE.—If no curtain for back stage is available, hang folds of gray or violet cheese-cloth against back wall. Screen exits at L. and R., with trees of various sizes. Trees in tubs may be used, but the tubs should be hidden with cut branches. Mark a roadway with a wide strip of old white canvas across stage and place artificial grass or green cloth on the remainder of the stage floor. Across back of stage, slanting in such a way as to bring it a little down stage at the L., place a wall five feet or more in height. This may be made of gray canvas or paper stretched over frames and painted to look like old brick or stone.

In the wall toward L. make a gate, which should be a dull gray with lines painted on it to look like cracks. This gate has no latch. Vines should be arranged upon the wall so as almost to conceal this gate. When the gate is opened there are shown a path, brilliantly colored flowers, and trees or shrubs, all of which glitter and shine in a bright light that is thrown on them from behind the wall. The small ornaments, tinsel and "snow dust" used on Christmas trees will be effective here.

Artificial flowers may be placed on the ground along the base of the wall, with a few ferns. Trees or bushes R. and L. At R. there must be a pile of rocks, which may be made of boxes covered with canvas or paper with moss placed around the bottom. The exits at R. and at L. must be arranged so that the characters may pass on or off stage without going behind the wall.

OUT-OF-DOOR STAGE.—Use same setting. Mark exits with wooden frames covered with tree branches. With these same frames make back of stage at R. appear as a dense forest, into which runs the wall. Trees also at L. Outline the stage limit with a row of footlights concealed behind branches or ferns.

This stage setting is arranged so that it may be

managed easily by school children. Boys in a manual training class can make the wall and the gate. Trees may be brought from the country and fixed in standards similar to those used for Christmas trees. If given on a stage where there is no drop curtain the two acts may run into one.

In the dances as many children may be used as desired.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MUSIC

At the original production of this play the following music was used:

For the soft music at entrance of children, Act I, "The Prophet Bird," Schumann.

At end of Act I, where the children fall asleep, "Little Cradle Song," Opus 124, No. 6, Schumann.

Flute music, "The Shepherd's Song," or, if piano is used for the dance of the Spirit of Childhood, use "In My Neighbor's Garden," by Nevin.

For dance of fairies: "plaintive music," Waltz, Opus 69, No. 1, in F Minor, by Chopin, and the second part of the same waltz for the "joyful music" of the dance.

The four-line song on page 30 may be sung to some well-known air or may be spoken. Soft music may be played off stage while the lines are repeated.

A concealed phonograph may be used with good effect, and any simple music may be substituted for the above.

The Wonder Gate

ACT I

SCENE.—*Outside the gate of the Kingdom of Altruria. Soft music marks the opening of the Act.*

(*As the curtain rises a little* GIRL *runs in from* R., *arms outstretched as if endeavoring to grasp something. She darts here and there on stage. A* BOY *follows more slowly.* GIRL *runs to* L., *stops, drops arms dejectedly.*)

GIRL. There it goes! Oh, dear!

BOY. It was the prettiest butterfly we've ever seen!

GIRL (*going sadly to* C.). I don't believe butterflies like to be caught, anyway! Maybe it hurts them! I'm glad we couldn't run faster! What place is this?

BOY (*looking around stage*). I don't know! Hilda, perhaps we are lost!

GIRL. Wouldn't that be fun? I'm not a bit afraid, are you? It's so pretty here I'm sure nothing could hurt us.

BOY. That's just like a girl! Why, there could be all sorts of things behind those trees! Wild animals and ogres ——

GIRL (*clapping her hands joyously*). And fairies, maybe!

BOY. Fairies—in a place like this! How silly! Why, this is just like home is—trees and grass and a road! Fairies only live in funny places like the forests and in the moon and under rocks by deep rivers!

GIRL (*turning away*). I suppose you're right—only, as long as we're lost I wish we could see just one little fairy.

BOY (*consolingly*). Let's play a game!

GIRL (*running back to* BOY). Oh, fun! What shall we play?

BOY. Let's play that I am a king!

GIRL. And what shall I be?

BOY. Oh, you must be a slave, so I can command you!

GIRL (*turning away*). I'd rather be something else besides a slave!

BOY. But you see there aren't enough of us—you will have to be a slave. Kings always have slaves.

GIRL. Then I'm sure we can find something nicer to play. Let's be crusaders ——

BOY. All right! Let's pretend that we are knights from a distant land seeking for a treasure which has been left here ages ago! If we find it we will carry it away and give it to—to whom can we give it, Hilda?

GIRL (*thinking hard for a moment*). Let's have the treasure so big we can give it to everybody!

BOY. Fine! You begin (*pointing* L.) at that end of the wall and hunt and I'll look behind these trees.

GIRL (*shaking her finger at* BOY *warningly*). Be very careful around the trees—there might be ogres! (GIRL *goes* L. *and examines the wall, while* BOY *peeps behind the trees at* R.—*very cautiously.* GIRL *lifts vines on the wall at back stage and discovers the old gate. Calls loudly.*) Noel, see! Come here! I have found a gate—through this wall!

BOY (*running to her,* L.). But there is no latch! (*Pushes the gate.*) It will not open!

GIRL. Oh, push hard! I wonder what is on the other side! Oh, dear, what a funny gate, to have no latch!

BOY (*putting his eyes to the crack*). It's all bright and shiny inside!

GIRL (*pushing him away*). Let me look! Oh, see the flowers! It must be fairyland!

BOY. Fairies couldn't build a wall like this, stupid!

It is somebody's kingdom, I'm sure! I wish we could get through!

GIRL. Maybe we are the first to find this gate! I had to push these vines away! It looks very, very old!

BOY. If I were bigger I could crush it with my fists!

GIRL. Let's pretend that we can open it, only we don't want to! We'll play that the treasure is on the other side and we're guarding it. I shall stand close to the gate—like this. (*Draws herself into a rigid position like a sentinel.*) You walk back and forth and look for the enemy!

BOY (*stepping to* C.). I'm hungry! Mayn't we eat our cookies now?

GIRL (*reaching into her pocket and taking out cookies*). You may eat yours now if you want to—I shall save mine, because if we're lost we may need them more by and by. Here are yours. (*Counts them as she places them into his hand.*) One—two—three ——

BOY. Oh, give me that big one.

GIRL (*drawing back*). It isn't any bigger than the others!

BOY. Isn't it, though! Just measure it!

GIRL. Take it, then! (*Catches at* BOY'S *arm and looks toward* R.) Oh, Noel, who is this?

(*Both children retreat up* L.)

(*The* STRANGER *enters from* R. *She is bent and wrapped from head to foot in a gray garment. Her step is slow and faltering. She has an attitude of extreme weariness. In her hand she carries an old wooden box. She does not see the children who, frightened, are crouching against the wall watching her. Approaching the rock,* R., *she sits down upon it.*)

STRANGER (*to audience*). Oh, how long must I wander! No one will listen to me! No one will take my gift! I am very, very tired!

GIRL (*to* BOY). Poor thing—she is in trouble.

Let's speak to her! (*Comes down* R. *and approaches the* STRANGER.) Good-day, lady!

STRANGER (*turning*). Ah, a child! Good-day to you!

GIRL. I am Hilda—this is my brother Noel.

(BOY *comes down* R. *to* GIRL.)

STRANGER. And why are you in this lonely spot?

GIRL. We were chasing a beautiful butterfly! It had wings like silk, and it was like gold in the sunshine! Sometimes we would almost have it in our hands, and then it would slip away! We ran ever so far, and now we are lost!

BOY. But we're not the least bit afraid!

GIRL. No, we will find our way back, I am sure! Perhaps we may find a butterfly going the other way!

BOY. Are you lost?

STRANGER. No, I can wander all over the world and never lose my way, but I am always very lonely, for wherever I wander they will not let me stay!

GIRL. How cruel! And you are very old, aren't you?

STRANGER. As old as the hills themselves!

BOY. I should love to be like you, and wander all over this earth!

STRANGER. It would be fine indeed if one could see this earth always with your eyes, my children!

GIRL. You must be hungry. Won't you please take my cookies? (GIRL *holds out cookies.*)

STRANGER (*taking them*). How kind you are! I am hungry! (*Breaks a cookie and tastes it.*)

BOY (*looking for a moment at his cookies, then taking from his pocket a coin, and holding it out to the* STRANGER). I will give you this! It is a lucky penny and will bring you good fortune!

GIRL (*removing a string of red berries from her neck and giving to* STRANGER). And I will give you this! They are berries that I have gathered to make a necklace for my mother!

STRANGER. I cannot take what you have gathered for your mother!

GIRL. Oh, she has so much, and she will be glad! Please take them! I will say to her that I gave them to a poor old woman whom we met by the roadside.

STRANGER (*taking necklace and holding it up*). I will wear them more proudly than jewels!

BOY (*taking a bite from one of the cookies, looks at them longingly, then thrusts them into the* STRANGER'S *lap*). Take these, too.

STRANGER. But you, child ——

BOY (*shrugging his shoulders*). Oh, I don't want them!

STRANGER (*putting cookies in her pocket*). Oh, that the world might learn such a lesson of kindness! (*Rises from the rock.*) In return for the gifts you have given me I will entrust to you my treasure box!

(*Holds forward her wooden box.*)

GIRL. That is just like the game we were playing!

STRANGER. The game?

BOY. We were playing that we were knights in search of a treasure buried here ages and ages ago ——

GIRL. And when we found it we were going to carry it forth and give it to the whole world! We were just pretending, you know.

BOY (*to* GIRL). Shall we tell her our secret?

GIRL. Yes, let's! (*To* STRANGER.) While I was searching along the wall for the treasure I found a gate ——

BOY (*going up* L. *toward gate*). Come and see! It is such a queer gate—it has no latch!

GIRL. And when you peep through the cracks you see such beautiful things!

(*She takes* STRANGER *by the hand and leads her toward the gate.*)

BOY. It is like looking into an Easter egg!

GIRL. I am sure it must be fairyland!

BOY. And I told her it must be some one's kingdom!

STRANGER (*turning back to* R. C.). It is both!

Come closer to me, children! (BOY *and* GIRL *come* R. C. *close to her.*) Would you like to have your pretty game come true?

GIRL. Oh, yes! That's the best kind of a pretend game!

STRANGER (*coming down* R. C., *children following*). Listen well to me, my children. That is the Kingdom of Altruria beyond that gate! It is a land of wealth beyond mortal power to count! And just as I have wandered over the lands of the earth with my treasure box begging the foolish people to take it from me, so within that kingdom its Queen waits to give to the world the wealth of her palaces! All who enter that gate may gather of her riches until they can carry no more! But only through the gate must they enter!

BOY. But there is no latch!

STRANGER (*giving box to* BOY). Within this box is the word that will open the gate!

GIRL. But there must be a key to unlock the box!

STRANGER. It is a fairy key—forged of a rose, a tear and the tip of a rainbow!

GIRL (*clapping her hands*). There are fairies, then! I knew it, I knew it!

STRANGER. There are indeed fairies! Do you not ever hear them whispering as they play about in the tall grasses? They tend their babies in the tree-tops! Those are the lullabies we hear. They hold their fairy counsels under the ledges of rock by the side of the rivers.

GIRL. And do they love children?

STRANGER. Best of all! It is because children will listen to them! (*Moves* L. C.)

BOY. But why can't we see them?

STRANGER. Because our foolish eyes are so blind! There is much in this world we cannot see!

GIRL. But where can we find the fairy rose and the tear and the tip of a rainbow?

STRANGER. You must believe in the fairies! They will always bring help to you in your need if you have faith! I must go on now—with the box in your care I may rest.

BOY (*running up* L. C. *to her*). Oh, I'm glad we met you! I wish I had more cookies to give you!

GIRL (*running up* L. C.). And we will have faith in the fairies!

STRANGER (*walking toward* L.). Mind you guard well the treasure box I have given you! And let no one break down or climb over this wall, for then the wealth will disappear! Only by yonder gate must they enter!

GIRL (*waving a kiss from her finger-tips*). Good fortune, dear Stranger!

STRANGER (*turning and waving hand*). Farewell!

(*Children wave to her. Exit* STRANGER, L.)

BOY (*coming down* C.). Now we have a real game!

GIRL. Let me hold the box!

BOY. No—I will! I ought to, anyway!

GIRL. Let me part of the time—and you guard the road!

BOY. No—she gave it to me! You stand by the wall!

(*A tramping of feet—a low rumble and drumming is heard off* R.)

GIRL. Hark! What is that?

(*Both listen intently.* BOY *runs to* R. *and looks off.* GIRL *goes up* C.)

BOY. Oh—there are many men coming this way! They are coming from every direction!

GIRL (C.). Perhaps they are coming to seize the kingdom!

BOY (*running back to* GIRL, *catches her hand and drags her back toward the wall at* L., *at the same time thrusting the box in her hands*). Here—you may hold it! Let's hide behind these trees—they will not see us!

(BOY *and* GIRL *conceal themselves behind trees at* L. *Enter* ZAN *and* WIM, R. ZAN *is clad in a heavy uniform and carries at his side a huge saber. There are knives in his belt.* WIM *is in khaki uniform;*

across his back is strapped a gun. He wears boots and heavy spurs. A short sword is in his belt and in his hand is a long spear. They advance to C.)

ZAN (*laying a heavy hand on* WIM'S *shoulder*). So—we meet here!

WIM (*shaking off hand*). Yes—think you that your ships could bring you here from the North more swiftly than my brave horses?

ZAN. My ships are mighty—I brought an army, too!

WIM. Think you that I hope to take this kingdom single-handed? Ha!

ZAN (*turning and clapping* WIM *on shoulder*). You are a good foe, friend of the East! And I do not doubt but that even now Prince Bal is marching hither from the South!

WIM. Yes—word of this precious kingdom must have gone to each corner of this earth!

ZAN. And each will send its brave sons here to fight for it! (*Tramping of feet is heard off* L.)

WIM. I hear the sound of marching feet! It is Bal!

(*Enter* BAL, L. *He wears a dusty uniform, a knapsack on his back, a cartridge belt around his waist, a revolver in his belt and carries a gun at his shoulder. As he comes forward on stage he drags his gun, butt on the floor.*)

BAL (*pausing at* L.). Ha—Princes of the North and East—you have come before me!

ZAN. My ships are mighty!

WIM (*turning away*). My horses fleet!

BAL (*laughing*). What matters that? I am here—am I not?

WIM. That you are!

BAL. And as we marched we saw a great shadow in the western sky! "Thorl's army of air-ships," my men cried out! The Prince of the West will soon be here! (*Turns and examines wall up* L.)

ZAN (*turning down* R., *speaks contemptuously*). I

would not trade my trusty ships of the sea for his craft!

(*As* ZAN *speaks* THORL *enters quietly,* L. *He wears a close-fitting uniform of gray or khaki—a helmet on his head, tight leggings. One single weapon is thrust in his belt. He approaches the others unnoticed and laughingly answers* ZAN, *who turns in astonishment.*)

THORL (C.). My ships speed over land as well as sea, my friend! I am late, perhaps?

WIM (R. C., *stepping toward him*). We have only just arrived! I suppose the same errand brings you here?

THORL. Did you think that we in the West would sit with our hands folded while you carry off the wealth of this kingdom?

ZAN (*down* R.). I have brought with me sturdy men of the North!

WIM. And my brave army can charge on swift horses!

BAL (*joining others from up* L., *where he has been restlessly pacing backward and forward*). Though we marched hither on foot we have brought with us big guns!

THORL (*turning to him*). My country has sent us here armed with the latest weapons known to science! By the side of the deadly powder we use your guns are like toys!

BAL (*turning* L., *indignantly*). Toys indeed!

WIM. It matters not what weapons we use! It is the courage within that wins! The Spirit of Conquest, who guides us fighting men, has taught us that!

ZAN (*down* R., *with uplifted arm*). Aye—to the mightiest of us will go the spoils of this conquest!

WIM (R. C., *striking his breast proudly*). I have vowed to my country that I will conquer this kingdom!

THORL (*up* C.). My men do not know the word defeat!

ZAN. It is victory or death for the men of the North!

BAL (L.). The flag of my land shall rule this kingdom!

ZAN (*motioning toward wall*). They say no man has penetrated this wall! It looks very old—our armies can easily crush it!

THORL. Let us wait until the hour of twilight! At that time we can bring here our armies, crush down this wall and force our way into the kingdom. Then will the struggle be among us—and to the Prince whose army can carry off the treasure will go the victory!

ZAN. Well planned, Prince Thorl! I hate indeed to know that such as you must meet defeat!

BAL. In the South my people wait word of my victory!

WIM. My army is invincible!

ZAN (*going up* R.). We shall see! I leave you now! A truce until the hour of twilight!

(*Exit,* R.)

WIM (*going* R.). I must hurry to my men! They wait eagerly for some word!

(*Exit,* R.)

BAL. I am hungry! Even the thought of victory cannot stifle this craving for food within me!

THORL (*stepping close to* BAL). My stomach is hollow, too! I feel it beating against my backbone!

BAL (*removing knapsack*). Let me open my pack! Perhaps I have some morsel in here that you will like to share! (BAL *opens pack.* THORL *watches closely.* BAL *takes out two pieces of bread; gives one piece to* THORL.) Take this—we can eat as we go along!

(*Exit* BAL *and* THORL, R. BOY *and* GIRL *creep slowly from hiding place.* BOY *runs softly to* R. *and looks off.* GIRL, C.)

GIRL. Oh—weren't they—awful? What were they? Were they ogres?

BOY. Ogres—no, they are soldiers!

GIRL (*stifling a scream*). Soldiers! And were those things they carried guns?

BOY (*coming down* C.). Yes—guns and swords!

GIRL (*running to* BOY). Do you think they have come to fight for this kingdom?

BOY. Why, of course! Didn't you hear what they said? There is a treasure in this kingdom, and each one has come from his own country to carry it off!

GIRL (*turning away, sadly*). They will crush down the wall, and then the kingdom will be destroyed!

BOY (*nodding*). That's what fighting does!

GIRL (*turning to gate*). But the Stranger said we were to guard the gate!

BOY. How can we—we have no guns! And did you see how sharp their swords were, too?

GIRL (*going up* R. C. *and looking around helplessly*). What shall we do?

BOY. Perhaps we'd better go home!

GIRL. Never! Then we'd be cowards!

BOY. I'm awful hungry! I wish I had just one of those cookies.

GIRL (*running down* C. *to* BOY *and grasping his arm*). I know! Let's wait here until they come back! They were all so proud of their guns—we'll show them our box and tell them that there's something inside of it more powerful than any of the cruel things they have brought with them.

BOY. Good! We'll make them awfully frightened! You do know a lot, Hilda, even if you are a girl!

GIRL. You sit down against the gate, as if you were guarding it! I shall sit here. (BOY *runs up* L. *to gate, sinks comfortably against it.* GIRL *goes* R. *and sits down upon ground at side of rock; spreads out her skirts and places the box carefully upon her knees.*) She said if we just had faith the fairies would help us! We will just have to have a key—I wish a fairy would come now. (*Examines box.*) A fairy key—made out of a rose, a tear and the tip of a rainbow—what funny things! Where in the world can even a fairy find all three! I wish it were not so still! (*Places box on ground close by her side.*) Noel! Noel!

(*Turns her head to look at* BOY.) Noel! (*Sharply.*) Oh, he's asleep! (*Tosses her head.*) I'm not afraid, anyway! (*Glances over top of rock.*) I'm not—a—bit—afraid! (*Music is playing softly.* GIRL *crouches closer to rock and lays her head against it. Her eyes close drowsily.*) I'm—not—a—bit—afraid!

(*Music dies away.*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*Same as* ACT I. *Time: At the twilight hour.*

(NOTE.—*If given out-of-doors—the play may be given in one act, music marking the moment before the opening of the second act.*)

(*As curtain rises the children are seen asleep in the same positions as at the close of* ACT I. *Flute music is heard. The lights are dim. Enter,* R., *the* SPIRIT OF CHILDHOOD, *dancing. Not seeing the children she dances about the stage. Her merry dance is indicative of the abandon and light-heartedness of children. As the dance finishes she sees the sleeping girl; leans over her and lightly touches her cheek.*)

SPIRIT. A little girl! Oh, I love little girls! What is this I find upon her eyelid? (*Leans over* GIRL.) A tear! (*Holds it up between her fingers as if it were a real tear.*) Ah, they are precious! (*Makes a motion as though putting it into the bosom of her robe.*) What soft cheeks! They are covered with roses!

(*She kneels beside the sleeping* GIRL *and gently touches her cheek.* GIRL *slowly wakens. The* SPIRIT *springs to her feet and dances a step or two away.* GIRL *sits up straight and rubs her eyes.*)

GIRL (*down* R., *staring at* SPIRIT). Who—are—you? A—fairy? (*Springs to her feet and approaches the* SPIRIT.) A real fairy?

SPIRIT (*up* R. C.). Yes, I am the Spirit of Childhood.

GIRL (*clapping her hands*). Oh, I am so pleased to meet you! I have always wanted to see a fairy!

SPIRIT. Why, I often play with little girls!

GIRL. I suppose that is when we are the happiest.

Sometimes I feel a sort of singing here—in my heart—is that when the fairies are near?

SPIRIT (*nodding*). Yes!

GIRL. And do you really tend your babies in the tree-tops? Do you sing little lullabies to them?

SPIRIT (*nodding again*). Yes—the mother fairies rock their babies in the leaves of the trees!

GIRL. Oh, it must be lovely to be a fairy!

SPIRIT. But it is nice to be a little girl, too!

GIRL. I was dreaming of the butterfly! It was such a beautiful butterfly, with wings like golden webs—only it flew so fast that we could not catch it.

SPIRIT. It was a fairy butterfly!

GIRL. We ran and ran until we were too tired to run any further and then —— (*Suddenly she looks at the box, which she has placed upon the ground by the rock.*) Oh, dear—oh, dear! I had forgotten! We are in deep trouble! Please, Fairy, will you help us? (*Goes and takes box and returns to* SPIRIT.)

SPIRIT. Tell me your trouble!

GIRL (*running to* BOY, *shakes him to waken him*). Noel—Noel, waken! (BOY *rises slowly to his feet;* GIRL *drags him forward.*) This is my brother Noel! We were playing a pretend game that we were brave knights seeking for a treasure which we were going to carry forth and give to the whole world ——

BOY. And we found that old gate yonder ——

GIRL (*running up* L. *toward it*). It is a very funny gate, because it has no latch!

BOY. It's all beautiful inside when you peek through the cracks!

GIRL. And we were playing that the treasure was just the other side of the gate when a Stranger came along—from over there! (*Points* R.)

BOY. She was a very old woman and very tired!

GIRL. We felt so sorry for her that we gave her our cookies and the berries I had gathered for my mother.

SPIRIT. How kind you were!

BOY (*at* L. *of* SPIRIT). Yes, and I wish I had saved just one cookie—I'm hungry!

GIRL (*at* R. *of* SPIRIT). She was so glad to have the gifts, poor thing! She said she had been wandering all over the earth and that no one ever wanted her to stay among them. Isn't that sad?

SPIRIT. Very, very sad!

GIRL. She told us that beyond that wall was a beautiful kingdom in which there was so much wealth that it couldn't be counted! She said that any one could have the wealth who entered the kingdom through that gate but that if they crushed down the wall the kingdom would be destroyed and the treasure would disappear!

SPIRIT (*nodding*). That is true!

GIRL (*holding out box*). And then—because we had given her our cookies and the penny and the beads—she gave us this box, which she said she had carried all over this earth!

BOY. And inside that box is the only thing that will open that gate!

GIRL. But to unlock the box we must find a fairy key that is made of a rose, a tear and the tip of a rainbow!

SPIRIT (*counting musingly on her fingers*). A rose—a tear—and the tip of a rainbow!

BOY. And I'd like to know how one is ever to find such queer things!

GIRL (*to* BOY). Hush—they are not queer things!

BOY (*to* SPIRIT). And while we were hiding behind those trees over there (*pointing* L.) four soldiers came here and were plotting to attack the kingdom! At the twilight hour they are coming back, and they will bring their armies to crush down the wall!

GIRL (*sadly*). They will destroy the beautiful kingdom!

BOY. And they will kill one another—they said so! They have big guns and sharp swords!

GIRL. We are waiting for them to come back! We are going to tell them that within this box there is something that is mightier than anything they have brought—and that it will take them into the kingdom!

BOY. If we could only get the fairy key!

GIRL (*to* SPIRIT—*hopefully*). Can't you help us?

SPIRIT (*drawing them down* C.). Gladly—if you will promise one thing!

BOY (*eagerly*). What is that?

SPIRIT (*smilingly*). Always to see the gold on the wings of the Butterfly!

GIRL. Oh—we will!

BOY. If you are going to help us you must hurry! It will not be long until the twilight hour! And I'd like to know where you can ever find a rose, a tear and the tip of a rainbow!

SPIRIT. Tears are jewels! The fairies gather them and store them away! (*Pats her dress.*) I have one now that I stole from a sleeping child's eyelid!

GIRL (*looking around stage*). And the rose—there are no roses here!

SPIRIT. Ah, you doubt our magic! Do you not know, child, that fairy fingers can gather roses from your soft cheeks? (*Pats the* GIRL's *cheek.*)

(GIRL *puts hands to her cheeks in wonder.*)

BOY. Well, a rainbow will not be so easy to find! Mother says a rainbow comes when the sun shines through the raindrops and we haven't had rain for days. (*Looks upward.*) I don't believe it'll rain now ——

SPIRIT. You still doubt our fairy power? Have you ever seen a rainbow, silly Boy?

BOY. Of course I've seen them often!

GIRL. They are like ribbons in the sky!

SPIRIT. And have you ever seen the very tip of the rainbow?

BOY. Why, the tip always drops into the ground!

SPIRIT. Ah, truly! And there the fairies gather each tip and carry it away and hide it—for these rainbow tips are very, very precious!

GIRL. Oh, aren't fairies wonderful? But why do you suppose this key has to be made of a rose, a tear and the tip of a rainbow?

SPIRIT. The rose is for Joy, the tear is for Sorrow, and the tip of a rainbow brings Hope!

GIRL (*clapping her hands*). Aren't fairies wonderful?

BOY (*anxiously walking up* L., *then back again, down* C.). Will you make us this key quickly?

SPIRIT. You give me the promise that I asked?

CHORUS. Yes—yes!

SPIRIT. Then be very still! I will call out my fairies! You may watch from yonder corner! Do not speak or you will frighten them away!

(BOY *and* GIRL *go up* L. *and stand together.* BOY *takes box.* SPIRIT *goes* R., *puts hands to her mouth as if calling. A flute call is made off* R. *To joyful music the three* ROSE-FAIRIES *dance in* R. *Use a colored spot-light. They dance about while the* SPIRIT OF CHILDHOOD *watches from up* R. *To plaintive music the three* TEAR-FAIRIES *dance in from* R., *while the* ROSE-FAIRIES *take a position at* L. *At end of their dance the* TEAR-FAIRIES *group up* C., *while the three* RAINBOW-FAIRIES *dance gayly in from* R. *All join them—with the* SPIRIT *as a central figure—in a dance which finishes in a group at* C. *The group falls back, and the* SPIRIT *steps forward, alone, a golden key in her hand.*)

GIRL (*running* C. *to* SPIRIT). The key—the key!

BOY (*coming down* C., *carrying box*). Oh, may we have it?

SPIRIT (*holding key high*). Guard it well—for in that box you carry is indeed a weapon that is mightier than all the guns in the world!

GIRL (*clasping her hands*). Now we can save the beautiful kingdom!

SPIRIT (*giving key to* GIRL). Because you were kind to the poor Stranger she gave to you that box and because you are brave and did not run away I give to you the key! Now we must depart! There may be work in other places for our fairy hands to do!

GIRL (*holding key close to her heart*). We will always have faith in the fairies.

BOY. And we'll always know they are close around us!

SPIRIT (*waving her hand to fairies at back stage. Music plays softly*). Away—away! We cannot linger! (FAIRIES *dance off* L. SPIRIT *turns to* BOY *and* GIRL.) Remember—what you have promised!

(*Goes* L.)

GIRL (*stepping toward* SPIRIT *as she dances slowly toward* L.). We will always look for the gold on the Butterfly's wings!

(*Exit* SPIRIT, L. *Music changes to crashing chords.*)

BOY (*running across stage, looks off* R.). I hear the armies coming now!

GIRL (*standing* C., *very straight*). Are you frightened? I'm not! (*Music dies away.*)

BOY. They are coming in long lines! They have stopped! Those four princes are coming forward! See how bright their swords shine!

GIRL (*stamping her foot*). I think it must be horrid to be a soldier.

BOY. Each soldier carries a gun!

GIRL. How can they bear to kill each other?

BOY (*running back to* C., *seizes* GIRL'S *arm and drags her back to wall up* L.). Hush—they're here!

GIRL. Hold the box tightly!

(*The four Princes swagger on stage from* R. THORL *stalks across stage toward* L.)

ZAN (*pausing* R., *looks around*). All seems quiet within the kingdom! (*Comes down* R.)

THORL (*striking his chest*). It is the moment for attack!

BAL (*up* R. C., *looks at wall*). My guns can shatter this wall in a second! My men wait only a word from me!

WIM. And into the kingdom my army will charge!

(GIRL *steps forward to* C., *shyly.* BOY *with box behind him follows her.*)

GIRL (*up* C.). Please, sir, don't come any nearer!

WIM (R. C.). Ha—what's this? (*Steps back.*)

THORL (*who is down* L., *turns*). Two children—two little children!

ZAN (*grasping his saber*). What trick is this? (*To children.*) How came you here?

GIRL. We were chasing a butterfly—a beautiful butterfly with gold on its wings!

THORL (*impatiently crossing* R.). Come—come! Our armies wait while we prattle here with these babes!

GIRL. Are you really going to seize this kingdom?

(THORL *pauses down* R.)

ZAN. That we are! Our armies and our guns are a little way off—waiting a word from us!

WIM. We have come here from the corners of the earth to seize the treasure of this kingdom! (*Strikes his thigh.*) It will be a pretty fight!

BOY. You have very big guns?

BAL. Aye—and cannon, too!

ZAN (*slapping hilt of his saber*). And mighty swords!

THORL. And deadly powder!

GIRL (*taking box from* BOY, *and holding it out*). Do you see this box? Within it is a weapon that is much more powerful than any of your guns and swords and cannons!

BAL (*clapping* WIM *on the shoulder*). Listen to the child! That box!

GIRL (*proudly*). It is a fairy box!

ZAN. Fairies! (*To Princes.*) A child's nonsense!

(*Crosses* L. *threateningly, and stands* L. *of* BOY.)

THORL (*angrily*). It is madness to linger thus!

GIRL. If you just open the box the gate yonder will be set ajar and you can go in. But if you crush down the wall or go over it you will destroy the beautiful kingdom, and there will be no treasure!

ZAN (*to* BOY). And what have you to add to this pretty tale?

BOY (*hotly*). It is not a pretty tale! It is what

the poor Stranger told us, and she knew everything, because she had been all over the world!

WIM (*to Princes*). Their talk makes me shiver!

ZAN. 'Tis like the witchcraft of old!

BAL. It may be some trick!

THORL (*turning* R., *about to exit*). I will not listen!

ZAN. Wait a moment!

THORL. Wait while you listen to prattle of fairy boxes and witches?

WIM. A long time ago I believed in fairies! Can't fairies cast spells? (*Moves* C. *toward children.*)

BOY. They live in the tree-tops and grasses all around us.

(*Princes look fearfully at tree-tops.*)

BAL. They may bewitch our armies!

(*Moves toward children.*)

THORL (*stamping foot*). Enough of this nonsense!

ZAN. Nay, linger! What matters it if our charge is delayed a moment? Let us look into the box! There may indeed be in it something mightier than the powder of which you boast. (THORL *joins others up* C. ZAN, *to children.*) Give me the box!

(*The* GIRL *gives him the box. Then she holds out the key. Others gather around.*)

GIRL. Here is the key! It is a fairy key and was forged by the fairies from a rose, a tear and a rainbow.

ZAN (*up* L. C., *holds key high—mockingly*). A rose—a tear—and a rainbow—against our swords and guns!

WIM (*up* R. C., *slaps his thigh*). 'Tis foolishness!

GIRL. The rose is for joy, and the tear is for sorrow, and the rainbow tip brings hope! Aren't those things better than your horrid swords?

BAL (*to* WIM). The child has courage!

THORL (*to* ZAN). Open it quickly! (ZAN *brings box down* R. *The four Princes stand close together*

down R. *as* ZAN *slowly unlocks the box with clumsy fingers. He lifts the lid fearfully, stares into the box, then draws from it a yellowish scroll of paper; holds it up.*) What cursed trick is this!

BAL (*turning in disgust*). A piece of paper!

WIM (*leaning closer*). There's writing on it!

ZAN (*turning it over*). A mighty weapon indeed!

BAL. What is it?

ZAN (*throwing it to the floor, goes up* C. *and hands box to* GIRL). It is a song.

THORL (*turning* R.). We were mad to listen to their prattle!

BAL (*moving up* R.). Brats! On with our armies!

WIM (*laying hand on* ZAN'S *arm*). What are the words? It may be worth our while to read them!

ZAN (*picking up paper*). I cannot read them—here, Thorl, look them over!

THORL (*taking paper*). It is a language I do not know!

(BAL *comes down* R. *and seizes paper.* BOY *and* GIRL *come down* C.)

BAL. They are strange words—it seems as though I knew them once upon a time!

(ZAN *takes paper and thrusts it into* GIRL'S *hand. She and the* BOY *look at it.*)

ZAN. Read it!

GIRL. Why, this is simple! It is a song!

THORL (*sternly*). Read it—read it!

WIM. 'Tis written in the language of childhood! I had forgotten!

GIRL (*stepping forward*). Oh, it is so pretty! I will sing it for you!

THORL (*in disgust*). While armies wait! Bah!

WIM (*holding up his hand*). Perhaps there is some power of which we have not learned!

ZAN. Sing—child!

(GIRL *and* BOY *in hesitating tones sing the song. They repeat it more gayly a second time—and a*

third time they turn to the audience and sing it in clear, loud voices. See note also on page 7.)

"The only thing worth having is a joy in life—
The only thing that never can be gained by strife!
So throw away your weapons—enter hand in hand
And gather of the treasure in Altruria's land!"

(*The Princes listen intently. As the verse is sung the third time the gate opens very slowly.*)

BOY (*who has turned as he sings the last line*). Look—look! The gate is open!

BAL, WIM } (*turning*). A gate!

(ZAN, *at the* BOY'S *outcry, has stepped toward the gate; turns quickly back to the Princes.*)

ZAN. What magic is this? Their song has opened this gate in the wall! Where are our armies!

(*Princes rush toward* R. *to go after their men.* BOY *and* GIRL *run toward gate, pause in wonder and retreat down* L. *Slowly, with dignified step, the* QUEEN OF ALTRURIA *walks through the gate to* C. *She is dressed in white and silver—a silver-trimmed mantle and a silver crown, and wears necklace of red berries. She holds up her hand.*)

QUEEN. Stay—good men! Welcome—welcome to my kingdom!

(*Princes halt in astonishment; involuntarily salute.*)

GIRL (*to* BOY—*as they stand shyly at* L.). It is our Stranger!

QUEEN (*turning and smiling at children*). Yes—my children—I am the Stranger! See, I wear the little berries as proudly as though they were jewels!

ZAN (*stepping forward*). Our visit to your kingdom is not one of peace!

QUEEN. I know! It was I who wandered over the earth telling its people of the wealth of my kingdom! And I carried with me the little song that

they might have learned! But because I seemed like an ugly old woman no one would listen to me!

ZAN. I come from the North with mighty ships!

BAL. My men have brought with them heavy guns!

QUEEN. You will not need them here!

THORL (*turning away*). I have vowed to my people that I will return in triumph!

WIM. And my men prefer death to defeat!

QUEEN. Silly men! My kingdom has wealth so great that you may each of you take back all you can carry, and there will still be more!

GIRL. Then they needn't fight?

QUEEN. No. Through yonder gate they may enter my kingdom at will. For a long, long time I have waited for mortals to come and gather the wealth that is there!

ZAN (*stepping to her side*). What is this strange treasure for which we have come with our armies?

QUEEN. Do you not know? It is a wealth more precious than gold! Brotherly Love, mortals call it!

BAL (*to other Princes*). Love—brotherly love!

WIM. More precious than gold!

ZAN. But our armies ——

QUEEN. Bring on your armies! All may enter—but it must be in peace! Throw away your weapons!

(*Princes stare at her, then at one another.*)

ZAN (*to Princes*). This is strange warfare!

WIM. No fight—no victory!

BAL (*stepping out from the group, holds his hand high*). This Queen is greater than any of us! Let us follow her!

QUEEN (*turning from them*). Throw away your weapons—you will not need them here!

ZAN (*turning to Princes*). I obey!

(ZAN *throws his arms down at the foot of the wall with a loud clatter.* BAL *and* WIM *quickly follow suit.* THORL, *who has stood hesitating, head bent, down* R., *goes last of all and lays reverently on the pile his single weapon. They turn to the* QUEEN.)

QUEEN (*waving hand toward the gate*). Brothers—enter! My kingdom is yours!

(ZAN *leads the way.* BAL *and* WIM *go arm in arm.* THORL *follows last. Exit through gate up* L. QUEEN *walks slowly toward the gate.*)

GIRL (*taking a shy step forward*). Farewell, dear Queen!

BOY. We must find our way home—our mother will worry!

QUEEN. Go on your way, happy children! No longer need you guard the gate! It will always be open! But sing the song as you go!

GIRL. We will! (*Children wave.* QUEEN *turns at gate and waves her hand slowly. Music plays very softly. As* QUEEN *disappears through the gate the* GIRL *suddenly points upward.*) Oh—the Butterfly!

BOY. And it's going the other way! It will take us home!

GIRL (*running across stage, cries out joyfully*). It has gold on its wings! I see it! I see it!

(*As the music plays the children run off stage at* R. *in the same manner in which they came on. Music dies away.*)

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